

The History of Argentine Jewish Youth under the 1976-1983 Dictatorship as Seen
Through Testimonial Literature

A Senior Honors Thesis

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Abstract

From 1976 to 1983, the military dictatorship that controlled Argentina secretly kidnapped and tortured thousands of citizens for their alleged participation in subversive, anti-government activity. Among the most targeted populations were intellectuals, progressive political activists, young people, and Jews. Following the fall of the dictatorship, many survivors recorded their experiences in a unique literary style known as *testimonio*. While *testimonio*'s unique narrative structure and communal voice have been thoroughly examined by literary scholars, its historical context remains unstudied.

This project begins to address this lack of historical context by exploring a specific set of testimonios. *Testimonio* was particularly popular among Jewish survivors, many of whom foreground their Jewish ethnicity in their work. I intend to explore what it meant to be young and Jewish during and shortly before the military dictatorship in order to provide an enhanced understanding of references to Judaism in testimonial works. The study draws on four sets of documents. Official publications from institutions within the Jewish community, such as magazines and newspapers, were used to trace how youth participation in Jewish institutions and Zionist views shifted from the onset of Peronism to the end of the dictatorship. Memoirs, autobiographies and *testimonios* supplemented these accounts and provided insights about non-institutional views and participation. Institutional histories of major Jewish organizations and political histories about the relationship between Argentina's Jewish and gentile population established both internal and external political dynamics, particularly those related to Zionism and anti-Semitism. Last, broader studies of the dictatorship, particularly the nationally sponsored report on disappeared persons, *Nunca Más*, situated the Jewish experience in a larger, national context.

Three working hypotheses have emerged. First, the institutional Jewish community, which traditionally focused on immigrant aid, was de-centered by declining Jewish immigration to Argentina in the second half of the 20th century. Its focus shifted during this period to Zionism and the public image of the Jewish community was dominated by this focus, Jewish young adults kidnapped during the 1976-1983 dictatorship grew up in a gentile society that largely equated Zionism with Judaism. Second, Zionism was an extremely divisive issue within the Jewish community and non-Zionist Jews were alienated and excluded from traditional, dominant institutions. This isolated many secular Jews (those who identified with the Jewish community ethnically and culturally but not religiously), particularly left leaning young people associated with socialist parties, from the religious Jewish community. Last, anti-Semitism did not impinge on the Jewish community uniformly. The dictatorship targeted young, leftist Jews as subversives by virtue of both their social activities and their Jewish heritage. While, their Jewish identity made them more vulnerable to government-sponsored kidnappings, their leftist identities, particularly in the case of Marxists, made protection from the Institutional Argentine Jewish community less accessible because they were suspected of being anti-Zionists.

Introduction

And out of that name springs a voice that resonates despite myself, a voice that stands in front of me determined to speak its own text. - Nora Strejilevich¹

This project began when I read Nora Strejilevich's *Una sola muerte numerosa*, which recounts the author's kidnap and torture during Argentina's 1976-1983 military dictatorship. Written in a style now known among literary critics as *testimonio*, it includes fragments of court trial transcripts, other peoples' testimonies, television shows, speeches and the author's own story. While *testimonios* such as Strejilevich's rely heavily on literary mechanisms such as poetry, metaphor and dialogue to relay their content, the content itself is historical- the places, the people and the events are real. *Testimonios* are in many ways hybrid of literary and historical writing.

After reading Strejilevich's work, I began to look at other *testimonios* and the literary criticism about them. *Testimonio* is an extremely heterogeneous genre that has appeared in many Latin American historical contexts over the past four decades. Cuban *testimonios* explore the invasion of *Girón* and Nicaraguan *testimonios* recount the Sandinista revolution.² *Testimonios* from Central America such as Nobel Laureate Rigoberta Menchú's *Me llamo Rigoberta Menchú y así me nació la conciencia* recount the struggles of indigenous populations. Elena Poniatowska's *La noche de Tlatelolco* tells the story of the 1968 massacre of student activists during a protest in Mexico City. Following the fall of Argentina's last military dictatorship, many Argentines, like Nora Strejilevich, recorded their experiences in *testimonio* format.

¹ Nora Strejilevich, *A Single Numberless Death*. trans. with Cristina de la Torre. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2005), 170.

² George Yudice, "Testimonio and Postmodernism" in *The Real Thing*, ed. Georg Gugelberger (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 44-45.

As a graduating senior preparing to write an honors thesis, I initially wanted to do write an historiographic piece on the potential engagement of Argentine *testimonios* in historical research on the dictatorship. However, I did not have sufficient knowledge of the history of the dictatorship to analyze the *testimonios* as historical documents. As a result, I have narrowed my focus to a specific set of Argentine *testimonios* written by Jewish authors and historically contextualized their Jewish content using more traditional historical resources such as print media, autobiographies and institutional histories.

I have chosen to focus on Jewish testimonios because in my initial investigation of *testimonio* in Argentina, one of the things that surprised me most was the wealth of Jewish *testimonialistas*. During my initial research on *testimonios*, I was surprised to learn that in addition to Nora Strejilevich, the Jewish writers Alicia Partnoy, Alicia Kozameh and Jacobo Timerman all have written *testimonios*. I had erroneously assumed that as a former Spanish colony founded after the inquisition, Argentina was almost uniformly Catholic. After doing some cursory reading, I was surprised to find that at the time of the 1976 military coup in Argentina, there were nearly a quarter of a million Argentine Jews. This group suffered disproportionately under the dictatorship, as Jews are believed to have constituted no more than 2% of the total population, but formed an estimated 10% of the victims.³ The Jewish story during the dictatorship was clearly a distinct one and one that had been told with *testimonios*.

Over the course of the project, I further narrowed my focus to Ashkenazi Jews in Buenos Aires, with an emphasis on young people (between the ages of 16 and 30). Jews

³ David Sheinin, “Deconstructing Anti-Semitism in Argentina” in *The Jewish Diaspora in Latin America and the Caribbean: Fragments of Memory*, ed. Kristen Ruggiero (Portland: Sussex Academic Press, 2005), 72.

of Ashkenazi heritage make up most of the Jewish Argentine community, which resides predominantly in Buenos Aires and young people comprised the majority of the dictatorship's victims. Consequently, I felt that unearthing their story was the best way to begin my research.

My research focuses on five primary research questions: Who was considered to be a Jew in this community- was Jewish heritage enough or did one need to be religiously active? What did assimilation and integration mean to this community? How have Zionism and immigration shaped the Jewish community in Argentina? Who suffered from anti-Semitism? Was Argentine Anti-Semitism institutionalized during the dictatorship?

In this paper, I have traced the origins of some my questions back to the beginning of Jewish immigration to Argentina and proceeded to follow them forward up to the 1970s. The first sections, on immigration and change in the second half of the twentieth century within the Jewish community, attempt to trace the institutional policies and state relations that shaped the Jewish youth experience during the 1970s. The section on Jewish youth in the 1970s focuses on how these policies shaped the daily lives of young people as well and determined their access to Jewish communal political and social resources. It also looks at how Jewish identity was defined by different groups such as the Argentine government and Jewish institutions.

Drawing on my initial inspiration, I have chosen to include quotes from three of the most famous Argentine, Jewish *testimonios*, *Una sola muerte numerosa* by Nora Strejilevich, *La escuelita* by Alicia Partnoy and *Preso sin nombre, celda sin numero* by Jacobo Timerman. It should be noted that not all of these *testimonios* were written by

Buenos Aires Jewish youth. Partnoy and Strejilevich were both young, left-leaning Jews who were disappeared and released. Partnoy is from Bahía Blanca and I have chosen to include her work because in addition to being one of the best-known Argentine *testimonialistas*, her identity, as a Jewish Peronist, provides an interesting point of comparison for the other *testimonios*. Nora Strejilevich is an Ashkenazi Jew who grew up in Buenos Aires. Jacobo Timerman was a middle-aged editor of the Buenos Aires newspaper *La Opinión* and the only person to be successfully “un-disappeared” with a writ of habeas corpus. Although not young at the time of his disappearance, I have chosen to include his work because it is arguably the most famous Argentine *testimonio* and gives the perspective of an ardent Zionist, which is not present in the other two. My hope is that these quotes will complement the historical research and serve as a link between the literature and the historical context that I provide for it.

This project has produced three working hypotheses. First, the institutional Jewish community, which traditionally focused on immigrant aid, was de-centered by declining Jewish immigration to Argentina in the second half of the 20th century. It shifted its focus during this period to Zionism, and the public image of the Jewish community was dominated by this focus. The Jewish young adults kidnapped during the 1976-1983 dictatorship grew up in a gentile society that largely equated Zionism with Judaism. Second, Zionism was an extremely divisive issue within the Jewish community and non-Zionist Jews were alienated and excluded from traditional, dominant institutions. This isolated many secular Jews (those who identified with the Jewish community ethnically and culturally but not religiously), particularly left leaning young people associated with socialist parties, from the religious Jewish community. Last, anti-Semitism did not

impinge on the Jewish community uniformly. The dictatorship targeted young, leftist Jews as subversives by virtue of both their social activities and their Jewish heritage. While, their Jewish identity made them more vulnerable to government-sponsored kidnappings, their leftist identities, particularly in the case of Marxists, made protection from the Institutional Argentine Jewish community less accessible because they were suspected of being anti-Zionists.

Ultimately this project has revealed that “Jewishness” is a multi-faceted identity and the result of a complex web of factors including Zionism, Socialism, language use and education. Its definition changes in different conflicts and encompasses different and highly varied populations depending on social, political and religious context. The diversity of this identity is reflected in each *testimonio* and its unique presentation of Judaism.

Immigration

All the other Jews of Bar plus others from the environs, including the Timermans, who had survived the sufferings- which according to their rabbis had been imposed by God to herald the Messiah's arrival-, were killed by the Nazis in October of 1942. Some twelve thousand within a couple of days. My father, happily, had left Bar for Argentina in 1928.⁴ -Jacob Timerman

Modern Argentina is a nation built by immigrants. Never home to a large indigenous population, it was sparsely colonized by the Spaniards. After independence, its small labor force diminished its economic potential. Beginning in the Liberal Age (1880-1916), the *Generation of Eighty*, an oligarchic clique of landowners and politicians instituted export-led development strategies. They liberalized

⁴Timerman, Jacobo, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*. trans. by Toby Talbot. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), viii.

Argentine markets and increased the exportation of products in which it had an international comparative advantage (primarily beef, mutton and wool) in exchange for European imports (technology, capital, entrepreneurship and labor). A chronic labor shortage necessitated opening Argentina's doors to immigrants and resulted in an ethnically and culturally heterogeneous population with people from Italy, Spain, the Middle East, Eastern Europe and East Asia living in a shared community. In 1914, nearly 1/3 of the Argentine population was foreign born.⁵

Among the populations to immigrate to Argentina were both Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews who fled homelands due to political, religious and economic oppression. Jewish immigration to Argentina began with a relatively small number of Jews from Western Europe, mainly from France and Germany, and from Morocco. Beginning in 1889, a much larger population from Eastern Europe fled to Argentina to escape anti-Semitic repression.⁶ Ashkenazi immigration during this period tended to be communal. The simultaneous Sephardic immigration tended to be individual and economically based and took place primarily before 1930.⁷ Central European and Italian Jews came en masse during the Nazi era and a small wave came following WWII.

Jews settled both in Buenos Aires and in the countryside. In Buenos Aires, they resided in the neighborhoods of Once and Villa Crespo, where they labored in textiles

⁵Sandra McGee Deutsch, "“Changing the Landscape: The Study of Argentine Jewish Women and New Historical Vistas,” *Jewish History* 18 (2004): 50.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Adriana Mariel Brodsky, “The Contours of Identity: Sephardic Jews and the Construction of Jewish Communities in Argentina, 1880 to the Present” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2004), 23.

and light industry, as peddlers and merchants, and professionals.⁸ Outside of Buenos Aires, they worked primarily as farmers, often funded by the efforts of the Jewish Colonization Association. The JCA, founded in 1891 by the Baron Maurice Von Hirsch, financed farming settlements of Eastern European Jews in more liberal countries with less anti-Semitic repression and poverty. In Argentina there were several of these colonies in the Northeastern and Central provinces. At their peak in 1925, the Argentine JCA colonies boasted 33,135 inhabitants. The number of Jews living in the country decreased heavily after the onset of economic failures in the late 1920s and 1930s, during which people came to cities to look for employment.⁹

Communal organizing within the Jewish community revolved largely around immigrant charities. The *Sociedad de Protección de los Inmigrantes Israelitas* (The Society for the Protection of Jewish Immigrants or Sopromotomis as it was known locally) was established in 1922 to facilitate Jewish immigration and to help immigrants secure passage for other members of their families and send remittances home. The *Ezras Nochim*, which protected Jewish women from white slave traders, and individual *Landsmanchaftn*, or mutual aid organizations of immigrants from the same geographic homeland, were also major Ashkenazi Jewish organizational hubs.¹⁰ Ashkenazi and Sephardic communities remained primarily split and had some, but very limited interaction. The larger, dominant Ashkenazi community insisted on using Yiddish (Sephardic Jews spoke Ladino) and the language barrier hampered communal collaboration.

⁸ Deutsch, "Changing the Landscape," 50.

⁹ Brodsky, "The Contours of Identity," 16-19.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 20.

Argentine Jewish Institutional life became progressively more organized and eventually evolved into two central, primarily Ashkenazi conglomerate organizations. The *Asociación Mutual Israelita Argentina* (The Argentine Jewish Mutual Aid Society, or the AMIA) started on February 11, 1884 when the *Chevra Kadusha* (Argentine Jewish burial society) was founded. Officially renamed the *kehilla* (or community) in 1949, its primary goal of creating social conditions conducive to following the Halakha (Jewish law) and Jewish traditions.¹¹ The AMIA oversees the distribution of charitable funds, the Jewish school system in Buenos Aires and provides Jewish burials for its members. It has a directive council, half of which was elected annually using slates of candidates from different political parties. The winning party controlled all of the council's seats.¹²

The *Delegación Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas* (Delegation of Argentine Jewish Associations, commonly known as the DAIA) was founded in 1935 and is a central council that combines educational, cultural, professional, religious, and political Jewish organizations.¹³ While initially founded to fight anti-Semitism, it has become the community's larger representation to the external world (this is particularly important because it included Jews of every ethnic and religious extraction) and deals with Jewish interests at both the national and international levels. Each member organization has two representatives.¹⁴

The Jewish experience in Argentina was distinct from its old world predecessors in that while Jews lived together in neighborhoods and colonies and continued speaking

¹¹ Hernán Dobry, "Nueva Presencia y los desaparecidos," (M.A. diss. Universidad de Palermo, 2004), 20.

¹² Bell, "Bitter Conquest," 287-288.

¹³ Dobry, "Nueva Presencia y los desaparecidos," 20.

¹⁴ Bell, "Bitter Conquest," 289.

Yiddish and Ladino, they also participated heavily in the creation of a national culture. Alberto Gerchunoff, a celebrated national author, was born to Jewish Russian immigrants in *Entre Ríos*. His book *Los gauchos judíos* (*The Jewish Gauchos*) was published in 1910 and is considered a classic piece of Argentine literature about the struggles of immigrants.¹⁵ Jewish musicians such as brothers Luis, Oscar, Elías, and Mauricio Rubinstein, Ben Molar, Santos Lípesker, Julio Jorge Nelson, Manuel Sucher and Samuel Friedenthal wrote some of the most famous Argentine tangos.¹⁶ The Jewish neighborhood Villa Crespo had its own soccer team, Club Atlanta, which plays in the national league.¹⁷ Jewish women taught in normal schools on the Pampas, a reflection of President Domingo Sarmiento (1868-1974)'s belief that women could contribute to the national project as educators.¹⁸ Jews did not live outside of the state apparatus and were not only incorporated into, but also helped to develop Argentine culture.

However despite Jewish participation in the national project and while it has never rivaled Eastern European pogroms, Argentina's anti-Semitic undercurrent has surfaced various times over the past century. In January of 1919, in what is now known as the *Semana Trágica* (Tragic Week), Buenos Aires metallurgical factory workers held a general strike and a bloody conflict erupted between workers and the police. The violence escalated as anti-immigrant members of the middle class joined the police. The clash was only two years after the Russian Revolution in October 1917 and Argentina's relatively large Russian Jewish population was assumed to be affiliated with the

¹⁵ Robert Weisbrot, *The Jews of Argentina: from the Inquisition to Perón* (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), 184

¹⁶ Ricardo Feierstein, *Historia de los Judíos Argentinos* (Buenos Aires: Espejo de la Argentina, 1993), 341.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 347.

¹⁸ Deutsch, "Changing the Landscape," 52.

Communist Party. The strike violence was linked to class struggle and many of the anti-Communist factions waged violent campaigns in the predominantly Jewish neighborhoods.¹⁹ During this same period, the staunchly Catholic and anti-revolutionary *Círculos de Obreros Católicos* sponsored street corner speeches by priests who denounced Jews as socialists and wartime profiteers.²⁰

Ultimately, while Argentine Jews lived in relative safety the majority of the time,²¹ they have suffered from anti-Semitism. Anti-Semitic violence, as will be shown shortly, surfaced multiple times in the second half of the twentieth century, particularly after the capture of Nazi war criminal Adolf Eichmann in Buenos Aires and during the 1976-1983 military dictatorship.

Transition into the Second Half of the Twentieth Century

*How can a nation reproduce in every argument, though employing other words, the same monstrous crimes explicitly condemned and clearly expounded so many years before? That is the Argentine mystery: the fact that the world has been unable to avoid something seemingly destroyed forever in 1945, in the ashes of Berlin, in the gallows of the Nuremberg Trials, and in the United Nations Charter.*²² –Jacobco Timerman

The 1940s and the ensuing decades brought tremendous change in the Argentine Jewish community. The decline and near total cessation of immigration, the rise of Juan Domingo Perón, the Second World War, the creation of Israel and the kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann all contributed to the reorganization of the Argentine Jewish community and its experience under the dictatorship.

¹⁹ Sandra McGee Deutsch, "The Argentine Right and the Jews, 1919-1933," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 18 (May 1986): 118.

²⁰ Ibid., 119.

²¹ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews*, 36.

²² Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, 157-158.

World War II and the Jewish Community

"I heard that you're a Jew, is that right?"

"Yes, sir."

*"Okay. If you don't behave we're going to make soap out of you, understand?"*²³ -Alicia Partnoy

The 1930s and 1940s were periods of extreme economic and political turmoil in Argentina. The presidential elections in 1932 and 1938 both had voting irregularities and beginning in 1939, with the outbreak of World War II, Argentina lost access to European agricultural markets, which it depended on economically. Argentina did not quickly declare war on the Axis powers and the United States labeled it pro-Nazi and tried to limit its use of Argentine imports. In 1940, the Argentine President, Roberto M. Ortiz, whose health was declining, resigned, and his vice president, Ramón S. Castillo, replaced him. In June 1943 there was a military coup led by the *Grupo de Oficiales Unidos* (United Officers' Group).²⁴

While Argentina did not participate in World War II, the War was debated and central to its foreign policy during the first half of the 1940s. Following the attack on Pearl Harbor, at a meeting of Latin American foreign ministers on January 15, 1942 in Rio de Janeiro, Argentina, along with Chile, refused to break its ties with Nazi Germany and maintained a position of neutrality. It was the only Latin American country that maintained diplomatic, cultural and economic ties with Germany.²⁵ There were members of the Junta as well as civilian organizations that were pro-Axis and others that were pro-Allies and a vibrant political scene in Argentina fed off the international conflict.

²³ Alicia Partnoy, *The Little School: A Tale of Disappearance and Survival in Argentina*. trans. with Lois Athey and Sandra Braunstein. (Pittsburgh: Cleis Press, 1986), 61.

²⁴ Brown, *A Brief History of Argentina*, 192-5.

²⁵ Avni, Haim. *Argentina and the Jews*, trans. Gila Brand. (Tuscaloosa: the University of Alabama Press, 1991), 159.

Argentina finally severed its diplomatic ties to Germany in January of 1944 and declared war on Germany on March 27, 1945.

The Jewish community actively supported the Allied cause and both organized internal campaigns to promote the Allied cause and participated heavily in external groups. In 1942, delegates from the DAIA, JCA and Soprotimis lobbied President Castillo to intervene in the plight of European Jews. In addition to the lobbying of the Jewish community, the president also was approached by Miguel Ángel Cárcano, the Argentine ambassador in London who witnessed British protests of the Jewish genocide. President Castillo responded by instructing consuls close to the concentration camps in Europe to allow 1000 Jewish children under 14 to come to Argentina by the end of 1943. However, in the ensuing months after these instructions were given, Argentine officials did not actually carry out these orders. On May 21, 1943 Jewish activists approached the deputy minister of foreign relations, Roberto Gache, who was receptive to their requests and several days later reported that the minister had told Argentina's ambassadors in Europe to carry out the orders. Gache's announcement was hailed as a victory by the Jewish press, but in hindsight, their celebrations were premature. A military junta seized control of the Argentine government on June 4, 1943 and while Castillo was removed from office, the rescue of these children appeared to be moving forward. The Argentine government sent a request to free one thousand Jewish children from the concentration camps on June 24. Germany required that Argentina receive the children and not permit them to later emigrate to Palestine (which the Nazis claimed was a violation of Arab rights). When the Argentine ambassador to the Vichy regime in France asked if he should continue to negotiate with Germany to secure the release of these children, the military

junta's foreign minister told him to cease his efforts, that securing permission was now the responsibility of the individual applicants.²⁶

In 1941, a group of Argentine women organized the *Junta de la Victoria*, an antifascist organization that recruited approximately 45,000 women and included a large number of Jewish women.²⁷ These women organized benefit raffles and teas, knit clothes for people overseas, collected recyclable materials, looked for and documented the activities of Nazi sympathizers, and gave political speeches. As Sandra Magee Deutsch points out in her article, "Changing the Landscape: a Study of Argentine Jewish Women and New Historical Vistas," the inclusion of these Jewish women in *Junta de la Victoria* was important not only because of the group's fight against fascism, but because it represented women from an enormous number of ethnic, educational and class backgrounds coming together in a highly stratified society. The leadership of *Junta de la Victoria* included intellectuals and artists, oligarchic women, Catholics, immigrants, rural and working class women. Among the most prominent Jewish women involved were the head of the Communist National Feminine commission Fanny Edelman, sculptor Cecilia Marcovich and writer and educator Berta de Braslavsky²⁸ and actress Berta Singerman.²⁹

In addition to *Junta de la Victoria*, many Jews participated in the Argentine Communist Party (Fanny Edelman, Cecilia Marcovich and Berta de Braslavsky³⁰ being among them). During the 1930s and 1940s, the Communist party openly opposed

²⁶Ibid., 159-166.

²⁷ Deutsch, "Changing the Landscape," 49.

²⁸ Ibid., 64.

²⁹ Ibid., 66.

³⁰ Ibid., 64.

fascism and anti-Semitism in Europe and in Argentina and Jews participated in Communist groups and demonstrations.³¹

A wave of anti-Semitism commenced in the 1940s. In 1944, Entre Rios provincial officials accused 120 teachers from Villa Dominguez, the majority Jewish, of being unpatriotic, and, in many cases communists, and fired them. When the government realized that several of the fired individuals were of German-Christian descent with Jewish sounding last names, but no Jewish heritage, it rehired them. The Jewish women organized, and with the help of teachers' unions were able to pressure the governor of Entre Ríos, General José Humberto Sosa Molina, into reinstating them.³² 1940s anti-Semitism was also visible in immigration policies and rhetoric. Following World War II, the Jewish community lobbied for Jewish immigration to Argentina, but the Director of the Department of Immigration, Santiago Peralta, argued against their immigration, claiming that it was not in the best interest of the state. Peralta published a book, *Acción del pueblo judío en la Argentina (The Jewish Community's Action in Argentina)*, which included highly anti-Semitic depictions of Jews as corrupt individuals destroying Argentina.³³ According to Peralta, "Opposite this defenseless people [the Argentine people] stands the Jewish giant: solid, organized, with one guiding idea and one executive hand, master of all, since he manages finances and agricultural wealth, the main source of national life...A family home destroyed, a nation physically and morally corrupted by traffic in women and the lust for gambling- this whole tragedy is directed by

³¹ Ibid., 61.

³² Ibid., 52.

³³ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews*, 52-55.

the Jews, at the orders of the American colonist.”³⁴ Although he resigned from his position in 1947, Peralta’s anti-Semitic beliefs appear to have shaped foreign policy. Argentina actively encouraged European immigration during the 1940s in hope that it would expedite Argentine modernization, but seems to have discouraged Jewish immigration. In 1947 Argentina allowed 116,095 immigrants to enter the country, only 600 of whom were Jewish and in 1948 this number grew to 680 out of a total of 219,096 immigrants.³⁵

Clearly, the Argentine reaction to World War II was a very mixed one. As it struggled to help European Jewry, the Jewish community found itself both allied with primarily gentile causes such as *Junta de la Victoria* and the Communist Party and fighting government anti-Semitism. Argentina’s lack of participation in World War II did not mean that the war did not have a profound impact on Argentine society and political life.

Perón and Judaism

*“Your Jewish, but you’re all right,” the neighbor across the street once told Mama. They were Germans and, according to my parents, SS who had escaped to South America after World War II.”*³⁶ -Nora Strejilevich

When the Argentine military staged its 1943 coup, the new military administration included an ambitious colonel, Juan Domingo Perón. Initially the labor of minister, Perón successfully used his position to curry working class favor with improved working conditions and higher wage scales. In the 1946, presidential elections, Perón ran and won. Perón’s relationship to the Jewish community cannot be labeled friendly

³⁴ Ibid., 55.

³⁵ Ibid., 57, 59.

³⁶ Strejilevich, *A Single Numberless Death*, 19.

towards the Jewish community or anti-Semitic, as there is evidence of both. Perón became the first Argentine president to have a Jew serve in an upper government position (Angel Borlenghi, the Minister of the Interior³⁷) and he lobbied the Jewish community as an important voting block. On the other hand, he allowed entry of Germans to Argentina following WWII, a policy that resulted in the escape of thousands of former Nazis to Latin America and resisted the creation of the state of Israel (although he was the first Latin American head of state to establish diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv).

Perón's friendly overtures to the Jewish community were linked to his populist politics and desire to court United States favor. At the beginning of his presidential career, Perón lobbied the Jewish community as one of many minority groups that, as a populist leader without an oligarchic base, he depended upon to sustain power. Accordingly, in 1947 he established the Organización Israelita Argentina (OIA), which acted as an intermediary between the Jewish community and the national government. While the OIA's partisan identity (it was overtly Peronist) and failure to gain widespread popularity within the Jewish community prevented it from replacing the DAIA as the accepted Jewish spokesorganization, it did serve as a forum where Perón could publicly demonstrate friendship to Argentina's Jews and Israel. Perón and his wildly popular wife, Evita, attended the opening of the OIA offices in 1948, and had leaders visit US Jewish communities and give speeches on Perón's amicable relationship with the Jewish community in Argentina.³⁸ By the early 1950s, Perón's consistent support of Israel produced increasingly positive relationship between the Peronist State and Jewish institutions. Jewish papers generally wrote about Perón and his treatment of Jews and

³⁷ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews*, 60.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 61-63.

Israel in favorable terms, although they fell short of the fanatical praise seen in the mainstream press.³⁹ This relationship was also nurtured by a marked decline in anti-Semitic incidents and publications during the second half of the 1940s and early 1950s. After an anti-Semitic incident in a Jewish Buenos Aires café in August 1950, the Israeli embassy noted in its report that the incident was, “the first incident in the capital in the last two years.”⁴⁰

In addition to his populist Politics, Perón’s need to befriend the Jewish community was partially rooted in the fact that Perón saw his country’s own Jewish population as an integral link between himself, the United States and Israel.⁴¹ Perón’s relationship with the United States and Great Britain (both of whom imported Argentine beef and wheat) had been negatively impacted by his previously open admiration for Mussolini and the failure of Argentina to declare war on the Axis powers until the very end of World War II. He had further accrued suspicion by recruiting German intellectual capital following the Second World War. Seeing the German intellectual capital dispersed following the defeat of the Axis powers and its capacity to economically stimulate Argentina, Perón openly recruited German scientists, engineers and military experts through offices established in Switzerland and Sweden, including many former Nazis who had false papers obtained from the church or haphazardly handed out by the Red Cross.⁴² According to the German historian, Holger Meding, approximately 80,000

³⁹ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews*, 67.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 68.

⁴¹ Bell, Laurence. “The Jews and Perón.” (PhD diss. The Ohio State University, 2002),

12-13.

⁴² Rein, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews*, 169-170.

Germans and Austrians passed through Argentina during the decade after WWII and about 20,000 of these immigrants stayed (the rest went on to other countries).⁴³ While the US also recruited Nazi scientists, it criticized Argentina.

Allied hostilities manifested themselves in several ways. The United States openly campaigned against Perón during the 1946 Presidential election. The United States Ambassador, Spruille Braden, endorsed Perón's opposition, the *Unión Democrática* and the United States published an anti-Perón booklet called *Consultation among the American Republics with Respect to the Argentine Situation* alleging his collaboration with the Axis powers.⁴⁴ On the international stage, Argentina's fascist reputation impeded its admission to the United Nations. It was finally invited to join in 1947 and quickly established diplomatic relationships with the Arabic states, Lebanon, Syria, Saudi Arabia, Iraq and Egypt, many of whom were newly independent and were seeking international legitimacy and like Argentina, in need of allies.⁴⁵

Perón's stance on Israel, whose creation was contingent upon the backing that it received from the United States and Great Britain, was inconsistent and could be construed as either hostile or supportive. The first evidence of this ambiguous position came when, in 1947, Argentina abstained from voting on the UN resolution that divided Palestine into Israel (the Jewish state) and Palestine with a shared Jerusalem. This decision was a political maneuver designed to simultaneously highlight Perón's autonomy from the United States and his allegiance to the Arab world without disrupting economic bonds in the West. Perón did not want to alienate his Middle Eastern allies by

⁴³ Ibid., 171.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 17.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 4-5.

voting in favor of Israel. Likewise, he did not want to alienate the Jews, the United States or Great Britain by voting no. Adding to the tension was the reality that Great Britain was Argentina's dominant trading partner and although this relationship was already in decline, Argentina did not yet have a viable partner to replace the British.⁴⁶ The Peronist government feared that voting against Israel would be construed Anti-Semitic and would provoke prolonged international repercussions. Ultimately, the abstention enabled Perón to court both the Arab community and the British, establish himself as independent of the United States and not be labeled anti-Semitic. However, the one community that Perón alienated with this decision (although to a lesser extent than if he had outwardly voted no), was the Jewish community and this tension was somewhat alleviated when Argentina became the first Latin American country to have diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv.⁴⁷

Creation of the State of Israel and the Institutional Jewish community

*At any cost, they found it necessary for me to declare myself a Marxist. This demanded many hours of questioning and harsh treatment, without my being able to make them understand the obvious contradiction between being a Zionist and being a Marxist, according to their understanding of Marxism.*⁴⁸

-Jacobó Timerman

The creation of the state of Israel had a profound impact on the Argentine Jewish community. It polarized the Jewish community between Zionists and Socialists and ultimately resulted in control of the DAIA and the AMIA by Zionists and a fervent Zionist movement in Argentina. Where the community had once been dominated by

⁴⁶ Ibid., 3-5.

⁴⁷ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews*, 114.

⁴⁸ Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, 75.

immigrant aid, Zionism became the central ideological undercurrent in communal life and socialist and communist groups were pushed to the social periphery.

From its first days in Argentina, Judaism was often an ethnic and cultural identity as opposed to a religious one. There was a considerable Jewish, working class population in Buenos Aires that included many individuals involved in Bundist, socialist, anarchist and communist factions of Argentine political life.⁴⁹ Jewish involvement in Marxism was both an internal phenomenon and a site of integration. Russian and Polish immigrants in particular brought socialist ideas with them to Argentina and quickly established a network of resources for like-minded Jews. Within the Jewish community there were Marxist newspapers written in Yiddish such as the Bundist paper *Der Avangard* (the Vanguard) and *Idische Froi* (the Yiddish Woman) and secularized schools for Jewish children, or *Escuelas Laicas Israelitas* (Jewish Lay Schools).⁵⁰ The first Jewish labor Union, *Obreros Gorreros* (Hatmakers), was founded in 1906 and in 1907 the *Organización de trabajadores socialistas democráticas judíos* (Jewish Social Democratic Workers Organization) was founded.⁵¹

Zionists also established themselves in Argentina early on. From 1901 to 1902, J.S. Liachovitzky published the weekly paper *El Sionista* (the Zionist) and in 1908, Jacobo Joselevich began publishing *La esperanza de Israel* (Israel's hope). The first Zionist meeting in Buenos Aires was held in 1904 and the first regional Zionist conference, during which branches of the *Federación Sionista Argentina* (the Argentine Zionist Federation), was held in 1913. During the beginning of a Zionist-socialist sub-

⁴⁹ Feierstein, *Historia de los Judíos argentinos*, 185-189.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 188.

⁵¹ Ibid., 188.

current had its own publications *Nachrichten* (News) and *Broit un Ere* (Bread and Dignity, which was never circulated due to government censorship). However, despite its multiple parties and manifestation, Argentine Zionism was initially (especially during its first twenty years, from 1897 to 1917) as a largely idealistic cause by the general Argentine Jewish population and not truly expected to come to fruition.⁵²

The creation of the State of Israel brought Zionists new credibility and transformed from a secondary issue to the single most important issue within the Jewish community. The creation of the state of Israel also sparked heated conflict between these two factions of the Jewish community and ultimately resulted in the creation of a Zionist institutional community that excluded non-Zionists. As Marxists groups took direction from the anti-Zionist Soviet Union, they were in direct conflict with their Zionist counterparts. The first signs of trouble began to appear in 1949 when there was a domestic dispute between the Zionists and Progressives (non-Zionists with leftists political sympathies) on the distribution of funds that had been raised during the United Campaign for Israel. In its first year of existence, 1948 the campaign (which included Zionist, non-Zionists and Communists) had raised 44 million pesos to be distributed by the World Jewish Congress, the Jewish Agency for Israel, and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. However, in the renewal campaign in 1949, Communists and other progressive groups began a campaign objecting to the distribution of the funds through Zionist organizations and the use of these funds to finance Zionist activities. They published a list of demands in the Yiddish daily *Di Presse*, demanding more “popular representation” in the campaign’s executive committee and a plan for how the

⁵² Ibid., 189-191.

money could be distributed in a more satisfactory manner. When their demands were unmet, these groups began a counter-campaign, the “Popular Campaign” to provide direct assistance to popular sectors in Israel, but not to Zionist controlled groups or the Israeli government. The DAIA publicly denounced their actions in a formal declaration and in the December 1949 AMIA elections, and while the Zionist “Pink List” won, the Progressive slate still managed to capture nearly 40% of the votes cast.

1940s Soviet hostilities towards Zionism set off new tensions between Zionists and Marxists. Zionists had the upper hand in many of these debates as they controlled the AMIA beginning in 1947.⁵³ In 1952, the Czech communist party hung several Jews after accusing them of being involved in an international Zionist conspiracy involving Israel, the World Zionist Organization and the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee.⁵⁴ In January 1953, Soviet officials claimed to have uncovered the “Doctor’s Plot” and accused nine elite Russian doctors, six of them with Jewish surnames, of plotting to kill top Soviet Officials. Anti-Semitism was a mainstay in press coverage of the accusations, which, because Stalin died shortly after they were made, never led to a trial, and ultimately was revealed to be totally fabricated.

The Czech trials appear to have been the catalyst for a press war between Zionist and progressive papers. The Yiddish paper *Di Idische Tzeitung* denounced the Doctor’s plot, writing, “The government of Prague through the intermediary of its judges has shown itself loyal to the anti-Semitic tradition of Hitlerism” and *Di Presse* echoed these sentiments, calling the episode, “a monstrous calumny against the Jewish people.”⁵⁵ The

⁵³ Bell, “Bitter Conquest,” 289-303.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 294.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 294.

progressive paper *Tribuna* countered by writing, “the accused were not convicted for being Jewish, but rather for conspiring in the service of imperialism.”⁵⁶ The Zionist controlled DAIA proceeded to issue a resolution on December 4, 1952 that denounced the trials and precipitated another press sparring session. On December 15, 1952 at a special assembly, DAIA directive council wrote a resolution that banned anti-Zionist groups did not protest the actions in Prague. . The loss of membership deprived these organizations of communal financial support and access to protection against anti-Semitic attacks. The general assembly passed the declaration on December 21, 1952. On January 5, 1953 the executive council cut its financial support of five educational institutions associated with Progressives and on February 1953, the DAIA formally expelled four Progressive institutions and one non-Progressive organization⁵⁷

While the OIA had initially refused to take sides, and rested firmly on its political support for Perón and Perón alone, following the Moscow Doctor’s Trial, it issued a statement that said, “[the OIA] does not maintain any link with certain sectarian groups who appear to respond to international directive and whose mouthpiece is ‘Tribuna’...”⁵⁸ Perón himself summoned a delegation of representatives from the AMIA and the OIA on January 27, 1953 in order to express his sympathy towards the local Jewish community in the aftermath of the Czech and Prague trials and to promise that no anti-Semitic repercussions would be tolerated in Argentina.⁵⁹ The Zionists not only had widespread support in the Jewish community, but government backing.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 294.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 297.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 298.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

The impact of this decision became apparent when the Federal police shut down the Jewish Folks Theater in June 1953. Citing a law banning Yiddish in public, the theater, which performed Yiddish plays, failed to obtain the necessary permits to gain exception to the law. The theater, associated with a circle of progressive Jews, appealed to the larger community for help along with several other Progressive organizations and leaders who had suffered from similar persecution. The DAIA cited the 1952 edict excluding Progressives from the Institutional community and refused to support protests against the government's actions.⁶⁰

The overall impact could also be seen in AMIA elections. In 1948, the AMIA elections had two key slates- general Zionists and an alliance between socialist-Zionists and non-Zionists. The latter won by a mere 18 votes in an election in which 6, 533 votes were cast.⁶¹ In the elections of 1955, 16, 572 votes were cast. The Zionist slate won with 10,172, the Progressives had a distant second with 4,638 and a third slate took the remainder of the votes.⁶²

In the 1970s the rift between Zionist and Marxist factions would reappear as Jews who had left the institutional community decades before sought the help of this community in finding their disappeared children.

Post Perón

*We were fighting against Perón's dictatorship and his friendship with fascism; we were fighting for Zionism.*⁶³ - Jacobo Timerman

⁶⁰ Bell, "The Jews and Perón," 236-237.

⁶¹ Ibid., 289.

⁶² Ibid., 302.

⁶³ Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, 119.

In 1955 a military coup toppled Perón in what was later called the *Revolución Libertadora* (Liberating Revolution) and sent the populist leader into exile for the next eighteen years. General Eduardo Lonardi became the president and was replaced less than two months later by General Pedro E. Aramburu. Aramburu began a process of “de-Perónization,” removing Peronists from government positions, taking political action against labor organizers and union bosses and forcing military officers who were labeled as too accommodating of Perón into early retirement. In 1958, the military held presidential elections that excluded the Peronist party and Arturo Frondizi of the Radical Party won. In 1962, José María Guido replaced Frondizi and briefly held office until his own replacement by Arturo Illia.

The single most important event in the Jewish community during this period was the extradition of Adolf Eichmann from Argentina by Mossad agents in 1960. While anti-Semitism had never been absent from Argentina, it gained new momentum as Argentina and Israel clashed on the international stage.

Adolf Eichmann

*We, the grandchildren, barely knew what it meant to be Jewish. Was it a religion? A way of life? A race? An identity? Being a Jew means, simply, being seen as one. But we didn't know this then.*⁶⁴
-Nora Strejilevich

In 1960, Nazi genocide mastermind Adolf Eichmann, who led department of “Jewish Affairs” under Hitler, was discovered in Argentina. The Israeli Mossad secretly kidnapped Eichmann and took him back to Israel to stand trial for crimes committed against the Jewish people. The incident was simultaneously a victory for the Jewish

⁶⁴ Strejilevich, *A Single Numberless Death*, 23.

victims of the Holocaust and a flagrant violation of international law that fed anti-Semitic violence in Argentina.

Eichmann fled to Argentina in 1950. He had a false Red Cross passport⁶⁵ and lived in Buenos Aires under the alias of Ricardo Klement for the next 10 years. His family joined him two years after his arrival and continued to use the surname Eichmann. One of Eichmann's sons, Klaus, began dating the daughter of a German half Jew. In 1957, when Eichmann's name came up in Nazi trials in Frankfurt, the girl's father, Lothar Hermann, recognized Eichmann. Hermann alerted the Frankfurt judicial system of Eichmann's whereabouts and attorney general Fritz Bauer alerted Israeli officials of the Nazi criminal's whereabouts.⁶⁶ On May 11, 1960, Mossad agents secretly kidnapped Eichmann and took him back to Israel.⁶⁷

On May 23, 1960, Israeli Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion announced to the Knesset (Israeli legislature) that Eichmann was in Israel. While he did not announce where Eichmann had been kidnapped, the international press, beginning with *Time* magazine, quickly discovered and printed that Eichmann had been kidnapped in Argentina.⁶⁸ The incident was an insult to Argentine sovereignty, as by the norms of international relations, Israel should have notified Argentina that it suspected Eichmann was living in Argentina under an alias. The incident became doubly undiplomatic when it became apparent that Argentina had just signed an extradition treaty with Israel two days before Eichmann was kidnapped. While the treaty, which had not yet been ratified

⁶⁵ Uki Goñi, *The Real Odessa: Smuggling the Nazis to Perón's Argentina*, (London: Granta Books, 2002), 298-300.

⁶⁶ I found several versions of this chain of events. The Tuvia Friedman account is considerably different.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 312-3.

⁶⁸ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews*, 164-166.

by the Argentine congress, did not technically cover the crimes committed by Eichmann because the offenses occurred outside of both countries and had occurred prior to the creation of the state of Israel, Israel had demonstrated a lack of belief in Argentina's commitment to international justice and clearly snubbed it on the international stage.⁶⁹ The Israeli ambassador to Argentina, Arye Levavi, was declared 'persona non grata' on July 22nd⁷⁰ and Argentina and Israel faced a diplomatic crisis. However, neither side found such a crisis desirable and both the Argentine President, Arturo Frondizi, and the Israeli Prime Minister, David Ben-Gurion, worked to reconcile their countries using letters and a United Nations intervention.⁷¹

Despite the conflict's seemingly quick and amicable diplomatic outcome, the Eichmann incident remained an open wound in Argentina and became a rallying cry for anti-Semitic groups. The former-Nazi immigrant community harassed Lothar Hermann. After receiving death threats and being the target of constant verbal abuse, he and his family left Buenos Aires and resettled in Colon Suarez."⁷² Argentina had become the location for WWII spill over and Jews in the 1960s faced residual Nazi anti-Semitism.

Nationalist groups and sympathizers waged a campaign of anti-Semitic terror. In July 1960, nationalist and liberal students had a violent conflict in front of the University of Buenos Aires College of Medicine. Right-wing students shouted "We want Eichmann

⁶⁹ Ibid.,.

⁷⁰ . Rein, xvii.

⁷¹ Ibid., 175-183.

⁷² Towiah Friedman, *The Hunter*, ed. and trans. David C. Gross (Israel: Institute for the Documentation of Nazi War Crimes , 1961), 18.

back,” “Death to Jews,” and “Jews, go to Israel.” College and surrounding buildings had swastikas painted on them.⁷³

Among the most prominent anti-Semitic nationalist groups was *Movimiento Nacional Tacuara*. Founded in 1957 and consisting of a group of young, middle to upper-class men, *Tacuara* was a nationalist, anti-liberal group that consistently used anti-Semitic rhetoric. For example, at a political rally in Buenos Aires, *Tacuara* leader Ezcurra Uriburu declared “We repeat that we have no faith in our false liberal democracy made up of corrupt institutions which are tumbling down...We want a country free of politicians, free of dangerous demagogues and of Jews.”⁷⁴ *Tacuara* was affiliated with neo-Nazi groups as well as with the Arab League’s representative in Buenos Aires, Hussein Tirki, who worked as a Nazi propagandist and considered *Tacuara* to be an important movement to help reduce the international momentum of Zionism.⁷⁵ On August 17, 1960 at a ceremony to honor South American patriot San Martín, *Tacuara* members attacked Jewish pupils from Sarmiento High School and shot a fifteen year-old boy, Eduardo Manuel Trilnik.⁷⁶

An external government response to anti-Semitism failed to materialize. An editorial in the Jewish weekly *Mundo Israelita* complained:

The police never finds them out, never punishes them. The police know who they are, who commands them, where they meet..., their signals. They make no mystery of their intentions. They even announce in advance the base deeds they plan to carry out, but no one bothers them. On the contrary, the police authorize their public meetings, and the press, misinterpreting its mission, promotes them.⁷⁷

⁷³ Rein, 200-212.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 201.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 204-207.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 206.

⁷⁷ *Mundo Israelita*, August 24, 1960 in Ranaan Rein, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews*, 207.

The Jewish community used several strategies to cope with anti-Semitic attacks. On August 25, 1960, Sarmiento high school students and others organized a march to protest anti-Semitic violence. Local officials, alerted to the incidents, lobbied for change. Parents reshaped the educational system to provide more opportunities for Jewish youth in safe, secure environments. In July of 1960, the new *Tarbut* (culture) Day School opened especially to provide Jewish youth a school where they would not be vulnerable to anti-Semitic attacks. Several Jewish self-defense organizations were founded in the 1960s with financial support from the Israeli embassy and various Israeli emissaries. These organizations had limited success. When a group of young Jews assumed that a Volkswagen full of out-of-uniform police officers were members of *Tacuara* and exchanged shots. A police officer was wounded, two Jews suffered light wounds and seven were arrested. The government began to receive exaggerated reports about the scope of Jewish self-defense plans⁷⁸

The wave of anti-Semitism peaked with violent attacks against two young Jewish women. First, 19 year-old UBA college student, Graciela Narcisa Sirota was kidnapped and tortured on June 21, 1962. A group of unidentified men in a car abducted Sirota, beat her severely, covered her body in cigarette burns and tattooed a swastika on her chest. When her father filed a police complaint, the chief of police, Horacio Enrique Green, suggested that it was the work of leftist Jewish provocation and actually an attempt to incite social unrest in Argentina.⁷⁹ Sirota was a communist but anti-Semites who

⁷⁸ Rein, 207-211.

⁷⁹ Rein, 217-218.

identified her as a Jew and tortured her because of this identity.⁸⁰ Sirota's kidnap was followed by the outright murder of a second Jewish young woman, Mirta Penjerek, who was accused of feeding the Mossad when they kidnapped Adolf Eichmann.⁸¹

Despite her political affiliation, the DAIA protested the Sirota kidnap. It arranged for photographs to be taken of her injuries in order to combat rumors in nationalist publications that her injuries had been exaggerated and fabricated and preempted future attacks on her credibility, such as insanity, by hiring two psychologists, only one of them Jewish, to speak with her.⁸² When the police chief failed to bring the three assailants, who had been identified, to court, the DAIA published denunciations of Anti-Semitism and demanded better protection for the Jewish community.

The people of Buenos Aires matched the efforts of the DAIA. On June 28, a general strike took place and businesses and schools shut down not just in the Jewish neighborhood of Villa Crespo, but also in gentile neighborhoods. Many businesses put signs in their windows that read, "Closed in protest over Nazi Aggression in Argentina"⁸³ and on August 8th, the press published a manifesto rejecting the attacks and signed by major Argentine literary and political figures such as Jorge Luis Borges, Eduardo García, Manuel Ordoñez, Américo Ghioldí, Adolfo Lanus, Alejandro Lastra, Arturo Matov, Pedro Aramburu, Isaac Rojas, and Ernesto Sarmiento.⁸⁴ The Sirota affair highlighted that Argentina was not a uniformly anti-Semitic country and a considerable vocal gentile population rejected the anti-Semitic nationalism propagated by groups like *Tacuara*.

⁸⁰Rein, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews*, 226.

⁸¹Goñi, *The Real Odessa*, 318.

⁸²Ibid., 218.

⁸³Ibid., 220.

⁸⁴Ibid., 221.

Sirota's kidnap and torture also highlighted that anti-Semites did not distinguish between Zionist and non-Zionist Jews⁸⁵ and that no one with Jewish heritage was truly safe from such attacks. In 1963, the year following the Sirota episode, applications to immigrate to Israel skyrocketed from 693 individuals in 1962 to a staggering 4,255.⁸⁶ Over the five-year period from 1960 to 1965, 12,900 Jews immigrated to Israel. Their departure testified to both the Zionist identity of the established Jewish community and to the increasingly anti-Semitic atmosphere in Argentina.

1970s and Jewish Youth

The Junta Comes to Power

In the Argentina of 1977 every young person was guilty until proven innocent.”⁸⁷
-Nora Strejilevich

Arturo Illia resigned in 1966 and was replaced by a military government headed by General Carlos Onganía, who was later replaced by a military junta.⁸⁸ In 1973 democratic elections were held and the Peronist candidate, Héctor Cámpora had a resounding victory. Juan Domingo Perón re-entered Argentina on June 20th and successfully pressured Cámpora into resigning. Perón won the elections held by the interim president and began his third term as president of Argentina. On July 1, 1974 he died of heart failure and his third wife, Maria Estela de Perón (Isabelita), who was serving as his vice president, succeeded him.⁸⁹

On March 24, 1976, Isabelita's brief and disastrous presidency concluded when a military junta seized control of the country in a bloodless coup and sent her first into

⁸⁵ Ibid., xvii.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 228.

⁸⁷ Strejilevich, *A Single Numberless Death*, 34.

⁸⁸ Brown, *A Brief History of Argentina*, 221-235.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 234-237.

house arrest and then into exile in Francoist Spain. The military controlled the country until 1983 during which time there were three distinct juntas, the first a triumvirate of Admiral Emilio Massera, General Jorge R. Videla and Brigadier Orlando Agostí, the second, another triumvirate between Lieutenant General Leopoldo Fortunato Galtieri, Admiral Jorge I. Anaya and Basilio Lami Dozo and the third, having a single President, General Reynaldo Benito Bignone.

The military dictatorship solidified its power using a massive terror campaign against alleged subversive elements of society. Now known as the *Guerra Sucia* (the Dirty War), this operation mainly took place out of the public view in the estimated 340 *Lugares de Deténidos* (Places for Detainee Meetings, now commonly known as *Centros Clandestinos de Detención* (CCDS), or secret detention centers).⁹⁰ Unidentified men in civilian dress kidnapped individuals allegedly engaged in subversive behavior. People could be disappeared at anytime and anyplace: at midnight in their home, at work, or even on the street.⁹¹ Some of the disappeared were ultimately set free and others were murdered.⁹² Among the populations most frequently disappeared were social activists, Marxists, left-leaning Peronists, Catholic clergy working in slums, people considered to have suspicious professions such as psychologists and sociologists and Jews.⁹³ The victims of this process were overwhelmingly young: over 60% of the known victims

⁹⁰ Anderson, Martin Edwin. *Dossier Secreto* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1993), 205.

⁹¹ NuncaMás.org, "Part I: The Repression (Abduction)," Nunca Más. 6 August 2006. <www.nuncamas.org>., "Nunca Más. 6 August 2006. <www.nuncamas.org>.

⁹² NuncaMás.org, "Part I: The Repression (Death as a Political Weapon)," <www.nuncamas.org>.

⁹³ Sábato, "Prologue" *Nunca Más* by the Comisión Nacional sobre la Desaparición de Personas (London, Butler and Tanner Ltd. Frome, 1986), 4.

were between sixteen and thirty years old.⁹⁴

The dictatorship fell in 1983 during a period of hyperinflation and after a failed war against Britain over *Las Malvinas* (the Falklands). A new, non-Peronist, civilian president, Raul Alfonsín of the Radical Party, was elected in 1983. Shortly thereafter he established the *Comisión Nacional de Personas Desaparecidas* (CONADEP, The National Commission of the Disappeared) to investigate the fate of the disappeared. CONADEP investigated 8,960 cases of Disappeared individuals and compiled the report in *Nunca Más*. Following the publication of the report, there was a trial against the military officers in charge of *El Proceso* and five of the generals on trial were convicted.⁹⁵ Alfonsín's successor, Saul Carlos Menem issued a blanket pardon for those convicted for crimes committed during the Dirty War and since that time battles over amnesty laws and the legal culpability of the accused have become an ongoing battle. Today, under the leadership of President Nestor Kirchner, the trials continue for crimes committed during the *Guerra Sucia*.

The government and Jewish Youth

*They knew perfectly well every nook and cranny of the building that houses the Jewish agency. One of them refreshes my memory: 'The staircase is at the front, the office where they help the public, upstairs. Remember now?'*⁹⁶ -Nora Strejilevich

⁹⁴ NuncaMás.org, "Part II: The Victims, The Disappeared by Age Group," *Nunca Más*. 6 August 2006. <www.nuncamas.org>.

⁹⁵ Anderson, *Dossier Secreto*, 309.

⁹⁶ Strejilevich, *A Single Numberless Death*, 19.

The military dictatorship targeted anyone considered to be a potential source of ‘subversive’ behavior. As conservative Catholics, they promised to re-establish ‘Western and Christian Argentina.’⁹⁷ They labeled Jews as outsiders and Jews became prime targets for being disappeared. Freud, Marx and Zionism⁹⁸ - all considered to be illustrations of way sin which Judaism perverted the conservative, nationalist and Catholic identity.

The relationship between the dictatorship and its Jewish population was a problematic one that involved international economic ties and the discursive taboo against open anti-Semitism in a post-Holocaust world. On the surface level, the dictatorship appeared to be not only tolerant toward ‘unacceptable Jews,’ but friendly towards them. The government excused Jews in the military (a very small group as most Jews avoided military service) from service on the High Holy Days.⁹⁹ Israel imported Argentine wheat and Argentina became a major customer for Israeli weapons. At a 1978 celebration of the 30th anniversary of the state of Israel in Rosario, the Israeli ambassador Ram Nigrad declared that Argentina was not an anti-Semitic nation and that he had never felt and prejudice in his four years as the ambassador to the country.¹⁰⁰

He could say this because the most flagrant government sanctioned anti-Semitic events were either the work of rightist, anti-Semitic groups that the dictatorship allowed to operate with little restraint or happened inside the CCDs and as a result were not a part of official public discourse until the post-dictatorship. The Israeli Embassy helped approximately 400 formerly disappeared Jews to flee Argentina largely because of this

⁹⁷ Anderson, *Dossier Secreto*, 147.

⁹⁸ Sheinin, “Deconstructing Anti-Semitism in Argentina,” 74-75.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 77.

¹⁰⁰ “Paso Este Semana.” *Nueva Presencia*, 27 May 1978, 3.

economic relationship. The irony is unavoidable: even as Argentine political exiles fled to Israel, Argentine CCDS used Israeli Uzis.¹⁰¹ The military juntas facilitated the rise of other nationalist, conservative groups such as *Tacuara* and enjoyed relative impunity during the dictatorship. In the six month period following the coup when there was a general halt on the publication of ideological works, the right-wing *Milicia*, funded by the *Secretaria de Informaciones de Estado* (State Information Secretary or SIDE, the most important intelligence agency in Argentina), freely published a Library of Doctrinal Information that included *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, *The Ritual Crimes of Jews*, and works by Hitler, Nazi Chief Julius Streicher and Nazi propagandist Joseph Goebbels.¹⁰² In June of the same year a Jewish doctor was kidnapped and shot to death. Anonymous callers to Buenos Aires radio stations claimed that it was retribution for the doctor's alleged participation in the kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann. Two months later the anti-Semitic violence continued as gunmen fired shots at a Jewish school and cooperative bank, sticks of dynamite were placed in a Sephardic Synagogue and several stores owned by Jews were grazed by machine gun fire. The military attributed these acts to right-wing paramilitary organizations, but failed to stop them or punish them the way that it punished leftist groups and terrorists.¹⁰³

Anti-Semitism was ever present in the CCDs, where Judaism was a punishable offense. While exact numbers of Jews persecuted during *El Proceso* are hard to obtain as the total number of disappeared has been estimated to be between 10,000 and 30,000 people, there appears to be a general conclusion that the number of Jewish prisoners was

¹⁰¹ Feitlowitz, 106.

¹⁰² Ibid., 242.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 242.

disproportionate to the Jewish population. The *Comisión de Solidaridad con Familiares de Presos y Desaparecidos en la Argentina* (The Argentina Solidarity Commission of Families of Prisoners and the Disappeared), estimated in its report *La violación de los derechos humanos de argentinos Judíos bajo el régimen militar* (*The Human Rights Violations against Argentine Jews During the Military Dictatorship*) that 7% of the disappeared were Jewish as were 15.62% of the assassinated disappeared.¹⁰⁴ The *Escuela Secundaria Integral Scholem Aleyem* with the *Asociación de Familiares de Desaparecidos Judíos en Argentina* (The Integral Secondary School Sholem Aleyem with the Association of Disappeared Jews in Argentina) estimated that 1,900 Jewish disappeared, comprising 12% of the total while Jews formed only 0.8% of the population.¹⁰⁵ The largest estimate that I found of the Jewish population was 2%¹⁰⁶ and even this suggests that Jews (if read in conjunction with the *La violación de los derechos humanos de argentinos Judíos bajo el régimen militar* report which had the lowest disappearance rate) disappeared at a rate that was staggeringly greater than their presence in the population.

This reality was further confirmed by the individual testimonies of the survivors of the CCDS. In its *Informe sobre la situación de los detenidos desaparecidos Judíos durante el genocidio perpetrado en Argentina* (pamphlet on the Situation on the Detained and Disappeared Jews During the Argentine Genocide), the DAIA suggests that anti-

¹⁰⁴ Comisión de Solidaridad con Familiares de Presos y Desaparecidos en la Argentina. *La violación de los derechos humanos de argentinos Judíos bajo el regimen militar (1976-1983)* (Argentina: Colección Testimonios, 2006), 15.

¹⁰⁵ Escuela Secundaria Integral Scholem Aleyem con la Asociación de Familiares de Desaparecidos Judíos en Argentina. *Los derechos humanos: exposición del respeto a la dignidad de persona* (Buenos Aires: La Escuela Secundaria, 2005), 5.

¹⁰⁶ Sheinin, "Deconstructing Anti-Semitism in Argentina," 72.

Semitism manifested itself in several major ways including anti-Semitic harassment during the actual kidnapping, forms of extreme torture and humiliation in the CCDS, the use of Nazi symbolism, and “special interrogations” about secret Jewish plans.¹⁰⁷

Ample anecdotal evidence indicated that when kidnappers realized that the person to be disappeared was Jewish, the crime took on an extremely anti-Semitic tone.

Kidnappings did not have any pre-formulated procedure and as a result were extremely varied. They could take place anywhere: at peoples’ homes, in the street, in restaurants and when they were at work. The agents could be from any number of police or military units and were generally out of uniform. They often drove green or black Ford Falcons. As a result of the inconsistencies, the consistent insistence of anecdotal evidence of anti-Semitism suggests that such behavior was not simply the work of a few, rogue interrogators, but symptomatic of an anti-Semitic regime. Jewish Gregorio Lerner, who was disappeared on March 17, 1977 noted in later testimony that when the agents entered, they began throwing books to the floor, all of them in Yiddish. Another victim, Juana Miller says that when nine men entered her home and began to take anything of value, they found two passports with stamps from Israel. The men realized that the family was Jewish and they beat her son severely and began to make threats.¹⁰⁸ Carmen Elina Aguilar de Lapacó says that when twelve men entered her home on May 16, 1977 and discovered books by Jewish authors and realized that the father of the family was of

¹⁰⁷ Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas, *Informe sobre la situación de los detenidos desaparecidos Judíos durante el genocidio perpetrado en Argentina*. (Buenos Aires: DAIA, 1999), 8.

The DAIA included five types of anti-Semitism in its 1999 study. I have only included the first four because I felt that the text lacked sufficient evidence about the fifth, extortion. I could not find anecdotal or statistical evidence to support this conclusion and have consequently chosen to exclude it from my own paper.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 8.

Jewish ancestry, they harassed and abused the family with a much greater intensity.¹⁰⁹

While Judaism may not have been the primary reason for disappearing these individuals, after a Jewish affiliation was established, the kidnap instantly took on an anti-Semitic tone.

The second type of anti-Semitism was intense physical punishment and public humiliation directed particularly at Jews. Disappeared Jew Pedro Vanrell testified that one of these measures, called the “rectoscope,” and involved inserting a tube in a man’s anus or a woman’s vagina and placing a rat at the other end so that it could eat the internal organs of the fully conscious person.¹¹⁰ In a testimony given to CONADEP, a police death squad member, Francisco Andres Valdez, testified “I had a prisoner who was ‘mine.’ I had him tied with a dog’s chain and used to take him into the patio and walk around on all fours, making him bark. One day he didn’t want to, so I shot him in the head. He was a shithead Jew.”¹¹¹ Gentile prisoners confirmed the particularly harsh treatment of Jewish prisoners. Gentile disappeared Ana Maria Caraega testified that there were four Jewish boys in her camp who had no political involvement prior to their disappearance, but had been members of a Jewish socio-cultural organization and the guards would routinely harass them. They would ask if Jews were harassed in Argentina. If the boys said no, they were told that all Jews would be killed, that the guards were Nazis and if they said yes, they were told that human rights were not violated in Argentina and beaten.¹¹²

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 10.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 9.

¹¹² Ibid., 6- in chapter two, the testimony transcript.

The third type of anti-Semitism consistently invoked Nazi symbolism to both threaten and humiliate Jewish prisoners. In one of the most famous CCDS, the *Garage Olímpo*, former prisoners reported having their bodies spray painted with swastikas, being forced to scream, “Heil Hitler,” and listen to recordings of Nazi leaders, and having guards who routinely self-identified as Nazis and made jokes about soap and gas chambers.¹¹³

Last, Jews were routinely interrogated about Jewish conspiracies. The most popular conspiracy was *Plan Andinia*. Conceived by former University of Buenos Aires political economy professor and former legislator, Walter Berveraggi Allende, *Plan Andinia* was supposed to be a secret collaboration between Zionists and Communists to take over Southern Argentina and build a second Jewish State.¹¹⁴ *Plan Andinia* gained new prominence in 1975, when the state-owned television station, channel 11, ran a program on Libya. The show contained a number of anti-Semitic remarks including from the Syrian Ambassador to Argentina, Jawdat Attasi, who suggested, “The Jewish religion, the Jewish race, wants to run humanity’s resources.” The program also reported that there was a Jewish plan to take over Patagonia.¹¹⁵ *Plan Andinia* and Jewish takeovers were constant themes during torture and interrogation sessions with Jewish prisoners in the CCDs. Many times guards spent large amounts of time interrogating Jewish prisoners about the internal politics of Jewish organizations and the buildings that they owned in an attempt to “prepare” for the enemy. Nora Strejilevich, who had signed up for a trip to Israel immediately before being disappeared, was questioned about the

¹¹³ Ibid., 11.

¹¹⁴ Allan Metz, “Gustavo Juan Franceschi and the Jews: The Overcoming of Prejudice by an Argentine Prelate.” *Church History* 62 (June 1993): 211.

¹¹⁵ Anderson, *Dossier Secreto*, 145.

Jewish Agency with which she was affiliated and noted that she had the impression during her questioning that the guards already had extensive knowledge of the agency. Another disappeared Jewish woman, Miriam Lewin, recalled being asked if she understood Yiddish and when she said only a few words, being made her listen to a recorded phone message by individuals who appeared to believe that the Jews were trying to run Argentina.¹¹⁶

Ultimately, understanding the anti-Semitic undercurrent requires a bottom up look at history and the realization that while official discourse may not have included anti-Semitic statements, the compliance with the orders made by higher ups resulted in statistically significant anti-Semitic practices. To divorce one from the other fails to acknowledge the nature of the power structure. While the national government made friendly overtures to the Jewish community externally, its internal practices were overtly anti-Semitic.

The Jewish Community and the Disappeared

“Why don’t you just leave the country, Gerardo? The people from the Jewish agency can get you into Israel. That would help.”
“Can’t go to the airport without a marriage certificate. Remember Graciela’s a goy. Before we could emigrate to Israel we’d have to get married. And in order to get married we need time.”¹¹⁷-Nora Strejilevich

The Jewish institutional community (primarily the DAIA and the AMIA) did very little to help the disappeared, especially those affiliated with leftist organizations. As noted previously, its staunchly Zionist identity led it to have a much more limited view of Judaism than the state of Argentina. The only two examples of successful Jewish

¹¹⁶ Delegación de Asociaciones Israelitas Argentinas, *Informe sobre la situación de los detenidos desaparecidos Judíos durante el genocidio perpetrado en Argentina*, 6.

¹¹⁷ Strejilevich, *A Single Numberless Death*, 122.

intervention that I came across aided Marcos Resnizky and Jacobo Timerman, both of whom were Zionists.

Marcos Resnizky, the son of the DAIA president, Nehemias Resnizky, was kidnapped on July 27, 1977 by the First Army Corps and tortured for being ‘politically suspect.’ His father intervened on his behalf, lobbying both United States Secretary of State Cyrus Vance and the Argentine Minister of the Interior, Albano Harguindeguy to help obtain Marcos’s release. The First Army Corps was hesitant to release Marcos and he was freed only after the armed forces of the Interior Department killed two of his attackers. After his rescue, Marcos fled to Israel where he had been granted asylum, while his father stayed in Argentina and continued to serve as the DAIA president.¹¹⁸

Nehemias Resnizky’s intervention and subsequent decision to stay in office were highly controversial. The parents of other disappeared individuals sought help from Nehemias Resnizky and found him to be generally unreceptive to their requests for help. According to Matilde Mellibovsky, who was a founding member of *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* and whose 29-year-old daughter Graciela disappeared on September 25, 1976, Resnizky’s decision to stay in office was extremely selfish. He had exhausted his resources in obtaining Marcos’s release and, according to Mellibovsky, “After recovering his son, it was clear he couldn’t agitate for anyone else.”¹¹⁹

Further fueling their resentment was that Resnizky did a considerable amount of work for the dictatorship following the release of his son. When the Polish novelist and painter Marek Halter wrote in the French *Le Monde* that Argentine Jews were living in

¹¹⁸ Marguerite Feitlowitz. *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Terror*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 101.

¹¹⁹ Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Terror*, 101.

greater fear than their counterparts in Hungary, General Albano Jorge Harguindeguy demanded that Resnizky write a rebuttal. Resnizky complied and wrote a piece that suggest anti-Semitism in Argentina should be interpreted the same way that neo-Nazi groups in the United States and Western Europe are: as alarming but isolated. Resnizky also made a video to be shown at a Canadian Jewish Congress. Ironically, the film appears to have been received as proof that Jews were living under duress in Argentina.¹²⁰

Jacobo Timerman, the other Zionist who was freed largely through efforts from the Jewish community was a beneficiary not so much of Argentine Institutional Jewish community's efforts, but of the lobbying of the international community and the Jewish press. Timerman, the editor of the Buenos Aires paper *La Opinión*, was kidnapped on April 15, 1977. A known Zionist and political activist who agitated for the political left, his kidnap was well publicized both by both the international and domestic press. When United States president Jimmy Carter became aware of Timerman's situation, Carter intervened on his behalf, personally asking Videla to release him. Finally, over two years after being arrested, Timerman was released and the government gave him with enough money to cover his fare to Tel Aviv and ordered him on to an *Aerolíneas Argentinas* jumbo-jet.¹²¹

Other individuals were not so successful in obtaining help from the Argentine Jewish community. Relatives of the Disappeared appealed to the international community and found an ally in New York Rabbi Morton Rosenthal, who was the director of the Latin American Affairs Department of the B'Nai Brith ADL. Rosenthal recorded their

¹²⁰ Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Terror*, 101-102.

¹²¹ Anderson, *Dossier Secreto*, 285.

stories and sent the DAIA 600 names of disappeared Jews. The Vice President of the B’Nai Brith in Argentina responded with a letter insisting to know where Rosenthal got the names and another letter from Alfredo Baumetz, the B’Nai Brith leader, who, according to Rosenthal “was extremely irate” and insisted “I was endangering the community- according to him- and should stop.” Rosenthal did not stop and worked on the a series of booklets with photos and biographies of the disappeared and detainees which later became known as the Argentine Prisoners Project and had a circulation of nearly 25,000.¹²² The DAIA refused to respond to the demands of the international activists. Despite the fact that Rosenthal sent over 1200 names to the DAIA, the *Special Report on Detainees and Desaparecidos* that the DAIA issued in January 1984 (after Alfonsín had announced the formation of CONADEP) included only 195 names. Qualifiers such as “presumed guerilla,” “presumed montonero” and “active in politics since youth” accompanied many of the names.¹²³

Fighting Anti-Semitism: Nueva Presencia

In the pages of my newspaper, all the country’s anti-Semitic acts were protested and denounced. The president of the Jewish community, Dr. Nehemias Resnizky, then explained to me that they ought not all to be protested, for that would create a confrontation with highly powerful sectors of the army. There was a better tactic: to protest some and maintain silence over others, in an attempt to negotiate silence and survive.-Jacob Timerman,¹²⁴

While the institutional Jewish community did not confront the plight of the Jewish disappeared, the Jewish press did. Among the staunchest opponents of anti-Semitism and perhaps the staunchest advocate for the Disappeared in the Jewish Press, was *Nueva Presencia*, the weekly Spanish insert to the Yiddish daily, *Di Presse*.

¹²² Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Terror*, 100.

¹²³ Ibid., 102.

¹²⁴ Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, 139.

Di Presse was a Yiddish daily founded by a co-op of Jewish graphics workers that added *Nueva Presencia* in response to the lack of Yiddish reading young people. *Nueva Presencia*'s mission was to harmonize "Jewishness" and "Argentiness" and to provide a discursive space to discuss Jewish issues.¹²⁵ However, it ultimately did much more as it covered both anti-Semitism and disappearances.

From its first issue onward, *Nueva Presencia* denounced acts of anti-Semitism, particularly in the press. Among its most frequent targets was the nationalist publication *Cabildo*. *Cabildo* had a long history of anti-Semitic material: it was partially financed by Nazi Germany in the 1940s¹²⁶ and among the publications to denounce Argentine Jews following the Eichmann kidnapping.¹²⁷ *Nueva Presencia*'s attacks on *Cabildo* commenced for the first time in the seventh edition of the paper in an article, "Las Obsesiones de Siempre" (The Same Obsessions as Always), that denounced *Cabildo*'s accusation that Jews were trying to control the national finances.¹²⁸ A second article, published several weeks later, "«Cabildo», más allá del delirio" (*Cabildo*, Beyond Delirium), called the magazine populist and fascist and proceeded to highlight *Cabildo*'s decision to insult President Videla.¹²⁹ Given the dictatorship's intolerant stance on perceived subversion, *Cabildo*'s decision to print anti-government sentiments was dangerous and made doubly so by *Nueva Presencia*'s decision to highlight these statements. *Nueva Presencia* denounced *Cabildo* for a third time on December 24, 1977

¹²⁵ Dobry, "Nueva Presencia y los desaparecidos," 38.

¹²⁶ Rein, *Argentina, Israel, and the Jews*, 35- see footnote #6.

¹²⁷ Ibid., 205.

¹²⁸ "Las Obsesiones de Siempre," *Nueva Presencia*, 20 August 1978, 1.

¹²⁹ "«Cabildo», más allá del delirio?," *Nueva Presencia*, 1 October 1977, 1, 8.

after *Cabildo* attacked Jacobo Timerman as a criminal whose Jewish and Marxist views had undermined Argentine's national unity and sense of morality.

Nueva Presencia quickly became an important forum for protesting the disappearances and eventually helped to secure the release of Jacobo Timerman. Many of the first denunciations were very subtle and consisted quotes from foreign clergy and national figures about the disappeared. In the issue published on October 1, 1977, "Sábado Habla Claro (Sábado Speaks Clearly)" quoted the author and future chair of CONADEP:

Se habla ahora- agregó- de encontrar modelos internacionales. Yo, por el contrario creo que lo que hay que decir es que vamos a empezar a levantar la nación, una nación que ya que fundada por el poder modelo de los tres poderes, funcionando independientemente y la vigencia de esa gran cosa que es el derecho al disenso. Saber que una persona no a ser secuestrada por elementos de izquierda o derecha, ni sacada de su hogar a medianoche; esos son imperativos categóricos de la condición."¹³⁰

They talk now, he adds, of finding international models. In contrast, I believe what must be said is that we are going to begin to raise the nation, a nation that already is founded on the three, independent branches of power and the great effect of this system is the right to dissent. Knowing that a person is not going to be kidnapped by the left or the right, nor plucked from their home in the middle of the night; these things are categorically imperative.

This same style of subtle protest is clear in the December 31st issue, which included series of three short news pieces in a column, "Actualidad Nacional," which recount three incidents regarding the disappeared. The first piece quoted Catholic clergy who denounced violence (particularly) state violence and that explicitly used the word "desaparecidos" (disappeared). The second piece recounted the Argentine ambassador's response to accusations from American clergy members Thomas Quigley of the

¹³⁰ "Sábado habla claro," *Nueva Presencia*, 1 October 1977, 8.

Conference of US Bishops, William Wybbler of the National Congress of Protestant Churches and Morton Rosenthal of the B’Nai Brith that Argentina jailed prisoners of conscience. In order to explain the Argentine Ambassador’s denial, it had to first explain the accusation and thus managed to cover the plight of the disappeared with minimal self-exposure. The final piece noted the rejection of Jacobo Timerman’s wife’s writ of habeas corpus.¹³¹ The three pieces spoke in unison and alleged one more time that Argentina had disappeared people and their legal rights.

The paper became directly involved in the campaign to free Timerman and instead of simply covering what was said about the case, provided a forum for Timerman’s supporters. Timerman’s wife, Risha, published an open letter in *Nueva Presencia*¹³² and the paper organized an event with *Nueva Comunidad Israelita* that included appearances by the Rabbis Marshall Myer, Mordejai Ederj, Harás Hert and both Herman Schiller and fellow journalist Daniel Muchnik- all linked to Timerman’s release. Nearly 2000 people attended.

Nueva Presencia’s activities often put it at odds with the Institutional community despite the fact that it was a Zionist paper. According to its editor, Herman Schiller, there were moments when the DAIA¹³³ impeded its work, saying that *Nueva Presencia*’s coverage of *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo* or other human rights movements were exaggerated and that it was putting the entire Jewish community at risk by printing stories about the *Guerra Sucia*. Right-leaning circles of the community accused *Nueva*

¹³¹ “Actualidad Nacional,” *Nueva Presencia*, 31 December 1977, 6.

¹³² Dobry, “Nueva Presencia y los desaparecidos,” 47.

¹³³ “El fantasma de Dreyfus,” *Nueva Presencia*, 10 December 1977, 1.

Presencia of being subversive terrorist driven and of exploiting the Jewish community.¹³⁴

Ultimately, the human rights mission of *Nueva Presencia* was often in spite of, instead of in conjunction with, the established Jewish community.

Nueva Presencia's two workshops were bombed in 1981 and the loss of its press made it impossible to continue publishing the paper. When it went to the *Buenos Aires Herald* and asked for help printing, the paper refused on the grounds that it was too leftist. *Nueva Presencia* then went to the Catholic newspaper *Esquiú*, and *Esquiú* agreed to let it continue to print using their workshops. *Nueva Presencia* proceeded to separate from Di Presse and was finally forced out of business by hyperinflation during the 1980s.¹³⁵

Zionism

But I have survived, to give testimony. And I'm doing so, at age fifty-seven, in the land of Israel, where I 'm beginning this book a few days after the birth of the first Israeli Timerman, whose name is Nahum ben Nathan ben Jacob. That is, Nahum (he who brings solace), son of Nathan, who is the son of Jacob, who is the son of that other Nathan in bar who was the son of Jacob, whose grave he left when departing for Argentina.

*We have completed our voyage.*¹³⁶ - Jacobo Timerman

Regardless of the anti-Semitic and anti-Zionist undertones of the *Guerra Sucia*, Zionism continued to be an organizational rallying point for the Jewish institutional community during the dictatorship. The following section explores how young people participated in and learned about the Zionist cause.

Argentine Zionism was not simply blank check solidarity with Israel. The Argentine Jewish press rigorously covered issues being debated in Israel and Argentine

¹³⁴ Dobry, "Nueva Presencia y los desaparecidos," 56-57.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 81-82.

¹³⁶ Timerman, *Prisoner Without a Name, Cell Without a Number*, viii.

Jews had political identities and agendas based on Israeli politics. The 1970s included an array of Middle Eastern conflicts including the Yom Kippur war and these conflicts had a considerable effect on Argentina. In addition to its Jewish community, Argentina also has a large Arabic community and as tensions grew between the Arabic and Israeli community during the late 1970s, parallel tensions grew in Argentina. *Nueva Presencia* editor Herman Schiller took the revolutionary step of arranging a series of meetings with Argentine-Arabic paper *Assalam* editor Hector Caram to promote an amicable and peaceful relationship between the Argentine Jewish and Arabic communities. The two focused on Argentine issues instead of the Middle East.¹³⁷ There was an Argentine *Paz Ahora* groups that supported the push for reconciliation between Israel and Arab states led by Israeli Peace Now activists. There were also Argentine *Paz Ahora* detractors, who levied several accusations about its roots, including its potential as a communist instrument to destroy Israel.¹³⁸ The Zionist community encompassed a wide range of beliefs and hopes for Israel.

Zionist organizations, celebrations and art were ongoing and a central part of Argentine Jewish institutional life. There was a university Zionist group, *Federación Universitaria Sionista Latinoamericana* (FUSLA, Latin American University Zionist Confederation).¹³⁹ Organizations wrote into *Nueva Presencia* regularly and the paper also covered their events in the column “De la vida judía local (On Local Jewish Life),” which documented the induction of new members into Zionist youth organization Hejalutz Lamerjav and the 47th anniversary of the founding of Maccabi, a Zionist organization

¹³⁷ “Assalam-Nueva Presencia sigue el diálogo,” *Nueva Presencia*, 31 December 1977, 10.

¹³⁸ “Se afirma ‘Paz Ahora’,” *Nueva Presencia*, 10 June 1978, 1.

¹³⁹ “De la vida Judía local,” *Nueva Presencia*, 24 December 1977, 10.

stressing Jewish Education, Athleticism and Community.¹⁴⁰ Jews celebrated Día de Israel (Israel Day), March 4, 1978 with presentations about Israeli poetry and at an event the same month, young people performed Israeli poetry.¹⁴¹ Zionism also provided a constant physical flow of people between Israel and Argentina. Ads in the AMIA magazine *Comunidad* almost always included ads for travel packages to Israel. In 1978, in the Jewish weekly *Mundo Israelita*, there were ads calling for, “Brazos jóvenes para levantar la cosecha en Israel (Young Arms Needed for the Israeli Harvest).”¹⁴² On May 31, 1980, 2,800 young people crowded into the Estadio Obras to hear the Israeli singer Matti Caspi.¹⁴³

Argentine Zionism was a politically and culturally based identity that encompassed a wide range of activities and movements. Young people were surrounded by a variety of opportunities to express their support for Israel as well as to participate in its construction.

The Assimilation/ Integration Debate

They barely kept the custom of tearing their clothes at the passing of a loved one, lighting Shabbat candles, fasting and using all new dishes on Yom Kippur. Everything else was forgotten, like the samovar and the sugar cube in the mouth at teatime. The secret of assimilating into the new culture was to never look back.
-Nora Strejilevich¹⁴⁴

In addition to promoting Zionist Ideals, the Jewish community was immersed in a debate over assimilation and integration. As Jewish immigration plummeted and new

¹⁴⁰ “De la vida Judía local,” *Nueva Presencia*, 25 February 1978, 6.

¹⁴¹ “La juventud imprime su sello,” *Comunidad*, September 1980, 24.

¹⁴² “Requiere brazos jóvenes para levantar la cosecha en Israel,” *Mundo Israel*, 13 January 1979, 1.

¹⁴³ “De la vida judía Local,” *Nueva Presencia*, 25 February 1978, 6.

¹⁴⁴ Strejilevich, *A Single Numberless Death*, 22.

generations of Argentine Jews grew up in a world with declining connection to old world traditions, the question of how to retain Jewish identity became increasingly important. The creation of a new, Argentine based Judaism was not a new phenomenon. In 1944, a Sephardic magazine, *Israel*, noted the decreasing tensions between the different national Sephardic groups (Aleppo, Damascus, Smyrna etc) and said, “the youth no longer understand the old distinctions of origin” and that they were “Argentine –born, sharing the same tastes and language.”¹⁴⁵ However, during the 1970s declining enrollment in Jewish schools and decreased Yiddish knowledge suggested that the next generation might not simply be moving away from Old World distinctions, but from Jewish communal life.

In the 1970s, enrollment in Jewish schools was the exception rather than the norm. In a group interview with parents that enrolled their children in Jewish schools in the AMIA magazine *Comunidad*, one Jewish parent, Raúl Lipovetsky, estimated that only 30% of the possible Jewish student aged population in 1979.¹⁴⁶ This was troublesome because schools offered a point of religious and social orientation not just for students, but also for parents and the community. Jewish education differed considerably from public school education in that the curriculum focused on Jewish content. In an interview with *Comunidad*, Ariel Robinson, the civics teacher at Rambam, or *Instituto Integral Modelo Argentino Hebreo RAMBAM* (the high school for students planning to matriculate into careers as teachers in the Jewish school system) noted that his instruction centered around knowledge the Jewish communal organizations of the AMIA and the Vaad Hajinuj, which is in charge of the Buenos Aires Jewish school

¹⁴⁵ Deutsch, “Changing the Landscape,” 59.

¹⁴⁶ “Educación judía,” *Comunidad*, November 1978, 20.

system.¹⁴⁷ Jewish schools also provided a nexus for adult communal organizing. At Rambam there was an organization *Asociación de Amigos de la Escuela Rambam* (Friends of Rambam School Association) with weekly meetings to discuss the school and other communal organizations.¹⁴⁸ Jewish schools provided a point of Jewish acculturation for Jewish youth as well as a potential organizational hub for Jewish parents, both of which were partially lost as the number of students dwindled.

Declining admission was at least partially attributable to the high cost of tuition.¹⁴⁹ Argentina experienced high inflation during the 1970s and this often made private education an unaffordable luxury. There was actually a resurgence in the need for non-governmental social welfare services from the Jewish community. The AMIA, a hub linking Jewish people from all classes, was able to offer communal assistance through the *Departamento de Asistencia Social* (Department of Social Assistance) at the AMIA worked to help families find resources, such as school tuition, using communal funds and networks.¹⁵⁰ However, while the AMIA offered financial assistance and advertised it in print media,¹⁵¹ it does not appear have been able to substantially increase school enrollments.

Adding to worries about lost Jewish heritage was the declining use of Yiddish. Generally speaking, the Jewish youth (15-30) were native-born Argentines and as most did not attend Jewish schools, which taught Yiddish, they never learned the language. While some factions of the Jewish community, such as *Di Presse*, which added the

¹⁴⁷ “Rambam: los maestros del mañana,” *Comunidad*, September 1980, 33.

¹⁴⁸ “Rambam: los maestros del mañana,” *Comunidad*, September 1980, 37.

¹⁴⁹ “Educación judía,” *Comunidad*, November 1978, 20.

¹⁵⁰ “La filosofía de ayudar a ayudarse,” *Comunidad*, September 1979, 26-27.

¹⁵¹ “De la vida judía local, Advertisement, 24 December 1977, 3.

Spanish language insert *Nueva Presencia* in 1977, appeared to see this as simply a transition and quickly accommodated the linguistic preference of young Jews, others saw it as a loss of culture and a sign of assimilation. In September of 1979, *Comunidad*, an AMIA magazine, carried an article, “*La ‘crisis del Idish’ en las escuelas*” (The Crisis of Yiddish in Schools), which suggested that the decline of Yiddish was symptomatic of a greater internal failure to pass on Jewish patrimony as a whole and the need for a new policy and approach to Jewish education.¹⁵²

Another one of the strategies used to promote Jewish traditions and communal life was the creation of youth centered social spaces. The AMIA sponsored social activities such as dances for teenagers. College students had their own center and younger students had access to several *Centros de Juventud* (youth Centers) that promoted socializing with Jewish peers. The AMIA had the Vas Janoar or the Central Youth Department, which, according to its 1980 director, Simon F. Felenbok provided a central link between the community and the next generation of members.¹⁵³

One of the complicating factors in the assimilation debate was a sense of Argentine nationalism within the Jewish community. While clearly committed to Zionism, young Jews had a simultaneously strong commitment to Argentine nationalism. In a group interview of Rambam students published in the AMIA magazine *Comunidad*, the participants made it very clear that even teenagers who had been raised in very religious Jewish homes and Jewish schools. They considered it to be important that their Jewish educations not only nurture them as Jews, but also as Argentines. Seventeen year-old Rambam student Nora Mendelson noted:

¹⁵² Itzjok Niborski, “La Crisis del Idish,” *Comunidad*, September 1979, 36.

¹⁵³ “Voces de aliento, críticas y sugerencias,” *Nueva Presencia*, 15 October 1977, 7.

... en las escuelas se nos pone en contacto con la realidad y la cultura argentinas. De ese modo se vinculan dos realidades y dos culturas; la argentina y la judía. Eso es muy saludable. Sobre todo, sin que una cultura fagocite a la otra. Los alumnos de la escuela nos enriquecemos como argentinos y como judíos. Yo diría que mejora nuestra formación integral como personas.¹⁵⁴

... in these schools we are placed in contact with Argentine culture and reality. In this same way, the two realities and two cultures, the Argentine and the Jewish, link themselves. It's very agreeable. Above all, neither one is consumed by the other. As students, we are enriched as Argentines and as Jews. I would say that it benefits our personal development.

While students such as Mendelson grew up in a highly Zionist environment, they also had a clear devotion to Argentina and saw themselves as Argentine Jews and not simply one or the other.

Further evidence of Argentine nationalism within the Jewish community can be seen in the print media and political declarations of the Institutional community.

Comunidad featured interviews with famous author Ernesto Sábato and featured works by Jorge Luis Borges (albeit about Israel).¹⁵⁵ When the Falklands War broke out, Jewish school children marched in a parade celebrating the Falklands War. Five days before the invasion, the DAIA issued a statement declaring "The Jewish community...celebrates this historic moment together with other sons of the land...The Jewish people, pilgrims through the ages in Search of their ancestors' land finally recovered, have had enough experience to understand and support the act of recovery of the Malvinas for the national patrimony."¹⁵⁶

Argentine Judaism, even when anti-Semitism was on the rise, saw itself as distinctly Argentine and did not separate or exclude itself from the national Argentine

¹⁵⁴ "Rambam: los maestros del mañana," *Comunidad*, September 1980, 36.

¹⁵⁵ "80º cumpleaños de Borges," *Comunidad*, September 1979, 45.

¹⁵⁶ Feitlowitz, *A Lexicon of Terror: Argentina and the Legacies of Terror*, 105.

project. While it feared total assimilation, it did not see itself in competition with the state.

Conclusion

*Words written so my voice can pronounce them here, in this place that is neither dust nor cell but a chorus of voices resisting armed monologues that turned so much life into a single, numberless death.*¹⁵⁷

Testimonio authors reflect the myriad of ways to be Jewish in Argentina. Nora Strejilevich with limited contact with the Jewish community in a family that identified as Jewish. Her decision to self-educate about this identity was made as an adult. Her *testimonio* records multiple anti-Semitic incidents, her exploration of Marxism and her own lack of Jewish identity as a child. Alicia Partnoy barely mentions her Judaism noting half way through her *testimonio*, after describing an anti-Semitic encounter with a guard who threatens to turn her into soap, “Now that Chiche [the guard] had come out with the ‘discovery’ of my Jewishness, I realize this is the first time the subject of my race has come up here.”¹⁵⁸ In contrast, Jacobo Timerman, who, unlike the other two *testimonialistas* was middle aged, had grown up immersed in the Jewish community, participating in the Zionist organization Macabees as a young boy and growing up to be a life-long, ardent Zionist, anchored to the Jewish community. His *testimonio* foregrounds this Jewish identity and parallels what happened in Argentina to Nazi Germany.

¹⁵⁷ Strejilevich, *A Single Numberless Death*, 171.

¹⁵⁸ Partnoy, *The Little School*, 63.

These *testimonios*, written by such a diverse group of people, all of whom suffered tremendously under the dictatorship, illustrate the dynamism of Argentine Jewish identity during the 1970s. As this context illustrates, not one of these stories is truly an outlier. They are rooted in the complex historical web of factors including the end to massive Jewish immigration to Argentina, the creation of the State of Israel and the kidnap of Adolf Eichmann that shaped the Argentine Jewish experience during the 1970s. They reflect a myriad of factors that influenced Jewish identity including age, religious observance, ancestry, communal participation and political affiliation and their *testimonios*, when examined in conjunction, give the broad range of Jewish identities available to young people during the dictatorship.

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